



DECISION MEMO

Wildfire Tree Planting Project



USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forest
Lochsa – Powell Ranger District
Idaho County, Idaho

I. Background

After having reviewed relevant data, analyses, and public comments relating to this proposal, I have decided to authorize the Wildfire Tree Planting project located in the Lochsa Ranger District at the following legal coordinates: T33N, R6E, Sections 19, 29, 30 and 31 and T34N, 7E, Sections 7, 17 and 18 (Boise Meridian). (See attached maps.)

The category for this project is 36 CFR 220.6(d)(11): *Post-fire rehabilitation activities, not to exceed 4,200 acres (such as tree planting, fence replacement, habitat restoration...), to repair or improve lands unlikely to recover to a management approved condition from wildland fire damage, or to repair or replace minor facilities damaged by fire.*

II. Purpose and Need

Burn severity in the Woodrat, Four bit and Walde wildfires on the Lochsa Ranger District in 2015 was high and there is very little forest vegetation remaining. Relying on natural regeneration would result in stands dominated primarily by grand fir and Douglas fir, species susceptible to root disease and stem decay and likely to have low survival. By planting western white pine, western larch and ponderosa pine, species more resistant to root disease and stem decay, the project will help reestablish and promote diversity of the forested component in the burn areas. In turn, this will improve the overall health, structure and vigor of the stands, improve soil and water quality and wildlife habitat diversity within the larger wildfire-impacted landscape over the long term.

The project is needed to meet the requirements of the National Forest Management Act which states that *“All forested lands in the National Forest System shall be maintained in appropriate forest cover with species of trees, degree of stocking, rate of growth, and conditions of stand designed to secure maximum benefits of multiple use sustained yield management in accordance with land management plans.”*

Project Design / Environmental Mitigation

The Lochsa Ranger District is proposing to plant conifer tree seedlings of western white pine, western larch and ponderosa pine in stands burned by wildfires in the summer of 2015. Shade intolerant species, such as western white pine, western larch and ponderosa pine, tend to be fire resistant and longer lived.

Tree planting will occur in stands without any timber salvage operations. These stands were evaluated and it was determined that timber salvage is not viable.

The project will plant trees on approximately 321 acres within 14 stands (see Table below). The tree seedlings will be two year-old bareroot stock and will be planted on an 11 x 11 foot spacing. Planting will be accomplished by a contract crew with oversight by Forest Service Silviculture personnel.

Stands Proposed for Tree Planting on the Lochsa – Powell RD

Stand No.	Acres	T*	R*	Sec*	Watershed -Subwatershed	Wildfire
01050107060009	33	34N	7E	7	Lochsa - Dollar Creek	Four bit
01050107070001	37	34N	7E	7	Lochsa - Dollar Creek	Four bit
01050107070026	41	34N	7E	17	Lochsa - Mystery Creek	Four bit
01050107070032	63	34N	7E	18	Lochsa - Mystery Creek	Four bit
01050107070033	9	34N	7E	18	Lochsa - Mystery Creek	Four bit
01050107070049	26	34N	7E	7	Lochsa - Dollar Creek	Four bit
01050512050101	24	34N	7E	30	Lochsa - Canyon Creek	Walde
01050522020061	9	33N	6E	19	Lochsa - Little Smith Creek	Woodrat
01050522020062	13	33N	6E	19	Lochsa - Little Smith Creek	Woodrat
01050522020066	15	33N	6E	29	Lochsa - Big Smith Creek	Woodrat
01050522020080	4	33N	6E	29	Lochsa - Big Smith Creek	Woodrat
01050522030068	42	33N	6E	30	Lochsa - Little Smith Creek	Woodrat
01050522030069	2	33N	6E	31	Lochsa - Little Smith Creek	Woodrat
01050522030072	3	33N	6E	31	Lochsa - Little Smith Creek	Woodrat
Total acres	321					

* T = Township; R = Range; Sec = Section

All planting will be done using hand tools; no mechanical equipment will be used. There will be no other ground disturbing activities associated with the proposed action. Access to the sites will only be by existing roads. During wet conditions driving full size vehicles on roads will be limited and All Terrain Vehicles or walking will be used instead to minimize damage to roads.

Surveys will be conducted after the first and third growing seasons to monitor the survival and condition of the planted trees.

Design Criteria include:

- No roads or landings will be constructed.
- No mechanical equipment will be used for planting activities.
- Use of motorized equipment other than All Terrain Vehicles and hand held equipment such as power saws will not be permitted off designated roads in the project areas.

Project Implementation: Tree planting is expected to be implemented in the spring of 2016. The project will take approximately two weeks to complete, depending on weather.

III. Rationale for Decision and Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Decision

Based on information in this document and the project record, I have determined this project is not significant in either context or intensity (40 CFR 1508.27), that no extraordinary circumstances affecting

resource conditions exist (36 CFR 220.6), that this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS, and that it meets all the criteria outlined in 36 CFR 220.6(d)(11): *Post-fire rehabilitation activities, not to exceed 4,200 acres (such as tree planting, fence replacement, habitat restoration...), to repair or improve lands unlikely to recover to a management approved condition from wildland fire damage, or to repair or replace minor facilities damaged by fire.*

The rationale for my decision is based on: (1) the proposed action fully meeting the criteria for Categorical Exclusions, (2) the proposed action meeting the purpose and need, (3) the findings related to extraordinary circumstances, discussed below, (4) the project's consistency with laws and regulations, (5) the on-the-ground review and discussion with District resource specialists, and (6) my review of the Biological Assessments (BA), Biological Evaluations (BE), and specialists' reports.

Finding of the Absence of Extraordinary Circumstances to Resource Conditions

Based on the findings for resource conditions described below, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances are associated with my decision. Forest Service direction at 36 CFR 220.6(b) describes the resource conditions that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstance related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA.

Additionally, 36 CFR 220.6(b) states, "*The mere presence of one of more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. It is the existence of a cause-effect relationship between a proposed action and the potential effect on these resource conditions and if such a relationship exists, the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist.*"

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat or Forest Service sensitive species.

The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) Botanist and Fisheries Biologist have determined the proposed action will have "no effect" to species listed as federally threatened, endangered or proposed for federal listing or their habitat, and "no impact" to sensitive species or their habitat.

The IDT Wildlife Biologist determined the proposed action will have "no effect" to Canada lynx or its habitat. A "may adversely impact individuals or habitat" determination was made for black-backed woodpecker, flammulated owl, fisher, bighorn sheep, fisher, fringed, long-eared and long-legged myotis, gray wolf, Townsend's big-eared bat, and Western (boreal) toad. Overall, the effects would be minor and of short duration and would not result in a loss of viability, nor cause a trend towards federal listing or a loss of species viability range wide.

Based on the above assessment, no effects exist that will cause an incremental cumulative effect and no extraordinary circumstances were identified for these resources. For the complete analyses, see the Fishery, Wildlife and Botany Biological Assessments and Evaluations and specialists' reports in the project record.

2. Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds.

The Forest Hydrologist has made the following determinations:

Floodplains: The Project will not modify or occupy floodplains to an extent greater than already exists. As such, there will be no adverse impacts to floodplains; thereby complying with EO 11988 and FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3.2.

Wetlands: The Project does not propose to modify or destroy wetlands. As such, the Project will not adversely affect wetlands; thereby complying with EO 11990 and FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3.2.

Municipal Watersheds: The Project area is not located within a municipal watershed. As such, the Project will not adversely affect municipal watersheds; thereby complying with FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3.2.

Based on the above assessment, no extraordinary circumstances were identified for these resources.

3. Congressionally designated areas, such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas or National Recreation Areas.

The project area is not located in any congressionally designated area, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

4. Inventoried Roadless areas or potential wilderness areas.

The project is not located in a potential wilderness area; therefore, the proposed action will have no effect on Roadless characteristics as identified in 36 CFR 294. Based on the above assessment, no extraordinary circumstances were identified for these resources.

5. Research Natural Areas.

The proposed activities are not within or adjacent to any Research Natural Areas.

6. American Indians and Alaska native religious or cultural sites.

The Forest Cultural Resource Specialist has determined the above project has little likelihood to adversely affect cultural properties. As a result, a *No Inventory Decision* has been made. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to native religious or cultural sites.

7. Archaeological sites or historical properties or areas.

The proposed project is located in the greater confines of the 60,000-acre Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark. The Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Forest Archaeologist, have determined that the project will have *no adverse effect* to significant qualities of Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark because: (a) Previously disturbed landform, and (b) Minimal ground disturbance. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

IV. Interested and Affected Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Contacted

On August 25, 2014, letters providing information and seeking public comment were mailed to individuals, organizations, a variety of state and local agencies, and members of the Nez Perce and Coeur d'Alene tribal councils. These letters, as well as any applicable responses, are contained in the project record. Project information was also made available at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/nezperceclearwater> under NEPA projects.

V. Findings Required by other Laws:

Based on my review of the actions associated with this project, I find that the Wildfire Tree Planting Project is consistent with applicable Federal laws and regulations, including the standards and guidelines contained in the 1987 Clearwater National Forest Plan, as amended, as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976. My decision also complies with all Federal, state and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment and cultural resources, as follows:

National Forest Management Act and Clearwater National Forest Plan: The actions are consistent with the Clearwater National Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 1987, as amended), as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976. In addition, design features and mitigation measures ensure compliance with the act.

PACFISH Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs): All activities associated with the proposed action comply with direction regarding PACFISH (refer to the project record).

Endangered Species Act: A Forest Service Fish Biologist, Wildlife Biologist, and Botanist evaluated the proposed action with regard to the Endangered Species Act as documented in the Biological Assessments, Biological Evaluations, and specialist's reports, and determined this project is consistent with the Endangered Species Act.

Clean Water Act and State Water Quality Laws: The ID Team Hydrologist has determined that this project complies with the Clean Water Act and state water quality laws, and will protect beneficial uses.

Clean Air Act: This project will comply with the provisions of the Clean Air Act, and the rules, regulations, and permit procedures of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ). No prescribed burning or other activity with the potential to significantly affect air quality is proposed.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act: This project complies with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act since it will result in no substantial loss of migratory bird habitat, nor will there be any measurable impact(s) on Neotropical migratory bird populations as a whole.

The project complies with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director's Order #131 related to the applicability of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to federal agencies and requirements for permits for "take." In addition, the project complies with Executive Order 13186 because the analysis meets agency obligations as defined under the January 16, 2001 Memorandum of Understanding between the Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designed to complement Executive Order 13186.

National Historic Preservation Act: The proposed project is located in the greater confines of the 60,000-acre Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark. The Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Forest Archaeologist, have determined that the project will have *no adverse effect* to significant qualities of Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark.

This project meets the agency's responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act and is consistent with the *Programmatic Agreement between the Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer, the*

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the Region 1 National Forests in Northern Idaho Regarding the Management of Cultural Resources.

American Indian Treaty Rights: The Nez Perce Tribal staff has had the opportunity to review the project for impacts to Nez Perce Tribe Treaty rights or Nez Perce Tribal members' abilities to exercise those rights. The Nez Perce Tribe did not identify any concerns.

Environmental Justice: I assessed the proposed action and determined it will not disproportionately impact consumers, Native American Indians, women, low-income populations, other minorities or the civil rights of any American Citizen, in accordance with Executive Order 12898. No disproportionate impacts to minority or low-income populations were identified during scoping or the effects analysis.

Prime Farm Land, Range Land, and Forest Land: The proposed action complies with the Federal Regulations for prime land. The definition of "prime" forest land does not apply to lands within the National Forest System. The project area does not contain any prime range land or farm land. Federal lands will be managed with appropriate sensitivity to the effects on adjacent lands.

Energy Requirements: There are no unusual energy requirements for implementing the proposed action.

Other Laws or Requirements: The proposed action is consistent with all other Federal, state and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment and cultural resources.

VI. Contact Person

Questions regarding this decision should be sent to Jeff Chynoweth, Small NEPA Team Planner, c/o Nez Perce – Clearwater Supervisor's Office, 903 Third Street, Kamiah, Idaho 83536 or by telephone to (208) 935-4260 or FAX at (208) 935-4275 during business hours (M-F, excluding Federal holidays, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., PST).

VII. Signature of Deciding Officer



BRANDON KNAPTON
District Ranger
Lochsa-Powell Ranger District

5-5-2016

Date

Enclosure: Maps (3) of Project Sites

cc: Clare Brick

Project Site Maps

Wildfire Tree Planting Project Map 1

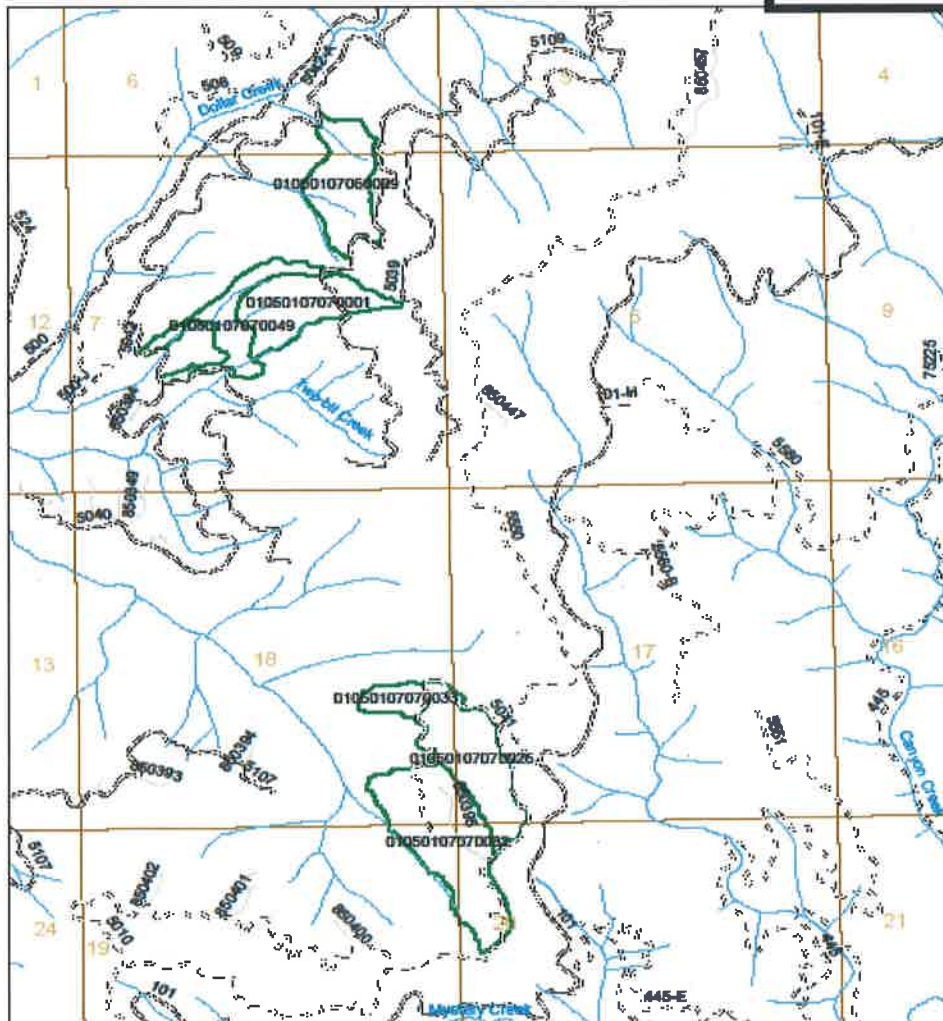
Central Zone Fire Planting NEPA



Scale 1:24000

Legend

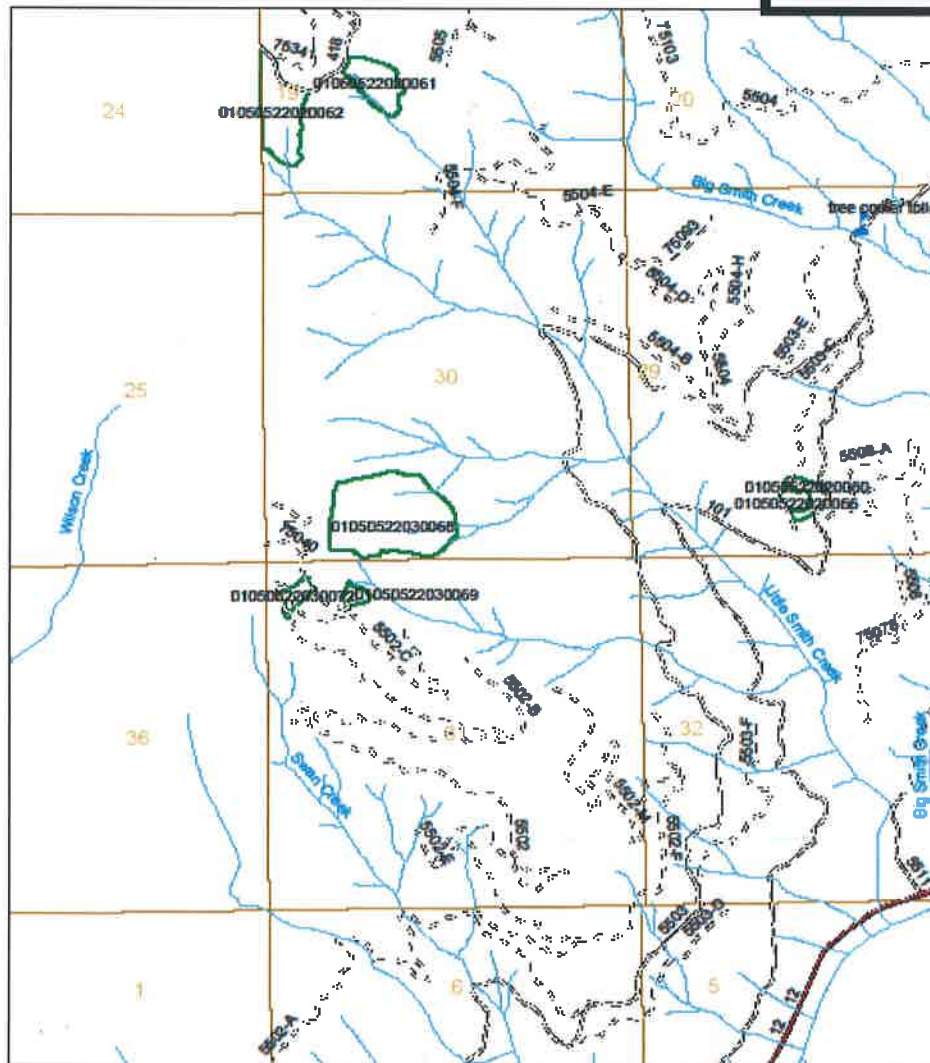
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- Road
- Symbol Name
- <NAB>
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- Paved Road
- Passenger Car - Gravel
- Passenger Car - Dirt
- Not Suitable for Passenger Car
- spring_plant_area_NEPA_stands



Central Zone Fire Planting NEPA



Scale 1:24000




Wildfire Tree Planting Project Map 3

Central Zone Fire Planting NEPA




Scale 1:24000


Legend


 **Streamline**


Road


Symbol Name


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 Highway - Forest Road


 Paved Road

 Passenger Car - Gravel

 Passenger Car - Dirt

 Not Suitable for Passenger Cars

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